

Spiritual Economy of The Golden Temple

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Towards an Understanding of the Spiritual Economy of the Golden Temple in India

Abstract

This article attempts to stretch the boundaries of the discourse of political economy, social theory, religious and Punjab studies by deploying the concept of spiritual economy in advancing the understanding of the politico-economic dimensions of a key religious shrine in the Indian sub continent. Amritsar's Golden Temple as a holy shrine is known as a site of sacred pilgrimage in the cultural universe of many communities in the sub-continent and diaspora. This article expands on the religious significance of the Golden Temple by exploring the site also as an economic institution in the daily lives of many communities in the region. By capturing the exalted religious-economic importance of the place, the article aims to add to the understanding of the site as a place of political contestation and of many conflicts in the history of the evolution of the Sikh community.

Introduction

This article develops the notion of the spiritual economy by examining how interlocking, overlapping and integrated processes of spiritual and economic activities are an integral part of the Golden Temple in Amritsar. The material realm, shaped and formed by the economy, and the spiritual realm, constituted by a complex array of reference points of piety, religiosity and belief, both contribute towards a dialectical set of processes which constitute what we identify as a spiritual economy. The Golden Temple has been commented upon mainly from the angle of the religious history of the Sikhs (Grewal 1996, 1997 and 2008, P. Singh 1989, P.B. Singh et al 1999) and in this respect, viewed primarily as a heritage site (Aulakh 2007, Johar 2008) or due to the tumultuous events surrounding Operation Blue Star which took place there in 1984 (Nayar and Singh 1984, P. Singh 1984, Tully and Jacob 1986). Although the Golden Temple is important for this historical significance, our attempt here is to examine the Golden Temple as a dynamic site which not only represents religion and religious history but also politico-economic currents, processes and activities. The spiritual-economic dialectic that we employ here is one way of looking at that dynamic which contains many different elements, some contradictory and others congruous.

There are certain tensions around bringing together the spiritual and the material, however. Where the economic is emphasized as the starting point,

we often see the religious and spiritual dimensions overlooked or suppressed. One obvious example of this can be found in post-Soviet countries where forcible suppression of religion through a privileging of the material during the Stalinist phase of these societies led to a rise in atheism and an overall rejection of religion. However, the contrary also occurs in the deliberate promotion of religion and the complementarity this has with economics, such as in the example of Hindu nationalists in India promoting non-material modes of thinking which has spurred the mushrooming of mystical and astrological services (Nanda 2009). The religious and material realms are increasingly being acknowledged for the significance that economic dimensions have in bolstering religious processes. On the one hand, the connections between the spiritual and the material, particularly in the form of personal possession and wealth accumulation, is often formally denied due to religious guidance to curb declarations of desire for profit, socio-economic ascension and greed. On the other hand, the linkages between spirituality and the economy circulate widely showing the intrinsic connections between spirituality and economic activity. This paper's focus will be on how the spiritual and material come together in ways which are often impossible to disentangle while also sometimes being less contradictory than they are complementary.

In order to highlight the spiritual economy of the Golden Temple, we begin by developing the conceptual dimensions of the spiritual economy, situating it within debates on capitalist development, religion and society. We then present a brief historical overview of the evolution of the Golden Temple using the prism of the spiritual economy as an angle for understanding it and the significance it holds for local and global Sikh communities. We conclude by situating the Golden Temple in the current contemporary context and look at the integration and interpenetration of spirituality and the economy through selected examples to highlight the embodied nature of the spiritual economy in the Golden Temple's history and symbolism.

Conceptualising the Spiritual Economy

The concept of the spiritual economy teases out the dialectical relationship between the spiritual and the material. Discourses on religion generally place emphasis upon the non-material, though there have been some significant efforts at exploring the interconnections (Giok 2005, Steiner 1986). This article aims to signify materiality within the domain of activities that are characterized as religious or spiritual. It does this by adopting two routes: one route looks upon religion and spirituality as a central point and then analyses economic or material activities surrounding these practices; the other route takes the economy as a starting point and looks upon spiritual activities as

responses to these processes. The concept of the spiritual economy as we are employing it here is meant to integrate these two routes.

The position of the spiritual or 'divine' in society has been debated across a range of perspectives and approaches, not least by the renowned Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century theorists, Durkheim, Weber and Marx, who each engaged in questions about religion's role in society. The positivist tradition within which Emile Durkheim (1965) theorized the role of religion offered a scientific, secular approach towards the study of religion as an expression of social life. By viewing religion's role within society as one of symbolic power rather than supernatural, Durkheim conceptualized religion as an expression of human beings' collective consciousness. Thus, far from being a matter of supernatural, imaginary and 'other worldly' belief, Durkheim viewed religion as an expression of the realities of social life, through the rituals, practices and belief systems across comparative societal contexts. Weber (2002) presented a more sympathetic view towards both capitalism and religion in his seminal book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber depicted people's choices to accrue wealth within capitalist societies as a rational pursuit towards economic gain. The example of protestant work practices compared to Catholic ones in northern Europe provided the foundation of "Weber's thesis" in which the pursuit of individual economic progress, that had been supported by certain types of Protestantism, namely Calvinism, in his explorations, showed a positive relationship between spiritual/moral meaning and material pursuits. Thus, Weber found that economic gain was not the aim of religious ideas, but had become a by-product of the interpretation of religious doctrines, showing an encouragement of the pursuit of economic gain rather than a denial of it. Thus, Weber concluded that the 'spirit of capitalism' in secular northern Europe had flourished through a work ethic which was inherently derived from a religiously identifiable community which embraced new modes of work, trade, investment and entrepreneurialism on a mass level which influenced the way in which capitalism developed in this part of the world.

The rigors of a materialist understanding of society within the Marxist tradition go further in connecting the spiritual with the material. The evolution of society culminating in capitalist relations is hinged upon an understanding that society emerges out of the material which is natural, not supernatural. Thus, materialist philosophy espouses a core argument that the material aspects of society constitute a reality which is empirically and scientifically driven. Within this framework, religion falls outside of the remit of reality and is therefore, according to Marx's widely cited declaration of religion as the 'opium of the masses.' This view of religion shows it as having a distracting, illusory effect on people's attentions away from the

realities of the material world of inequality and alienation through theological explanations and doctrines. Marx (1975) perceived a two-fold dimension of religion when, on one hand, he characterised religion as the opium of the masses while simultaneously seeing religion as a balm for the tormented and alienated conditions within bourgeois society:

Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless condition. It is the opium of the people.

To abolish religion as the illusory happiness of the people is to demand their real happiness. The demand to give up illusions about the existing state of affairs is the demand to give up a state of affairs which demands illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of tears, the halo of which is religion. (Marx 1975:75-6)

Contrary to the popular view of Marx' thinking on religion perceived as an anti-religion position, Marx had a much more complex understanding of and attitude towards religion. We may even characterise his understanding as one of sympathetic understanding through his concerns with the social order emerging out of materialist relations. He viewed religion as a social and psychological response to and against dehumanised conditions of day to day material life. Thus, it might be said that Marx was arguing that it was not religion per se which needed to be attacked, but the inhumane and alienating conditions resulting from capitalist relations. Within our materialist understanding, we are inclined to present a more open view towards the role that religion plays in people's lives as a survival mechanism within increasingly alienating circumstances of capitalist economic production, exchange and social relations. While material forces are what generate economic and social change, spiritual forces are also a significant part of people's immediate coping mechanisms within capitalist, consumer societies and cannot, therefore, be merely dismissed as illusory. Thus, for the purposes of this article, we attempt to adopt a non-reductionist, materialist understanding of the spiritual economy, which acknowledges religion's place within people's lives while also acknowledging its function in sustaining the capitalist social and economic order. Expressions of culture, faith and spirituality provide insights into the penetration of capitalism into society and in this sense are worthy of examination.

The discussions of the foundational authors discussed here raised key questions about religion's role in society and the economy during times of economic and social change in Western Europe. The particularities of the contexts about which they were postulating, observing and theorizing must

be understood within their respective frames, so as not to inappropriately apply European-specific aspects of their arguments upon other contexts. Similarly, the Golden Temple provides its own context of the dialectics of spirituality and economy in South Asia, with the site acting as a place of religious pilgrimage while also being at the historical centre of the economic hub of the city of Amritsar. This is not coincidental, but rather exhibits the embeddedness of the material and spiritual in the inception of plans to ensure that the shrine was at the onset protected and bolstered by local business families who settled and traded around the Golden Temple.

The Spiritual Economy of the Golden Temple

The Golden Temple, also known as Harimandir Sahib or ‘Temple of God,’ has come to be known as the most sacred and symbolic shrine for Sikhs, though it is also frequented as a tourist and spiritual site of pilgrimage by people of different religions. The Sikh religion was founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1539) who was followed by nine other gurus. The gurus, some of whom were martyred during this era of Mughal rule when there was immense contestation and upheaval around spiritual and political following and leadership, represented a cumulative effort to resist forcible domination while establishing their own spiritual path. This path eventually became formalized into a religion which was inspired by the scriptures and hymns compiled in The Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), who became the tenth and the last living guru, decreed that after his death the holy book The Guru Granth Sahib would be considered as the ‘guru’ for spiritual guidance from which Sikh congregations would be able to drive inspiration for taking decisions about the material and political world. The Guru Granth Sahib is held in every gurdwara. However, the Golden Temple, which houses the oldest original copies of The Guru Granth Sahib, is particularly revered as a central place of pilgrimage, having historical and symbolic significance to the region and its now globalised Sikh community.¹

The Golden Temple lies in the centre of the walled city of Amritsar in Punjab. The city’s foundation is symbiotically linked to the establishment of the Golden Temple. Thus, “from its foundations in the late 16th century to the establishment of Sikh rule in the Punjab around 1765, the story of Amritsar is the story of its [The Golden Temple] foundation and survival”

¹ After the partition of 1947 many other significant gurdwaras such as Nankana Sahib and Panja Sahib, which are also important pilgrimage sites, became part of what is now in Pakistan.

(Grewal 2008: 1). Founded in 1577 by the fourth Sikh guru, Guru Ram Das (1534-1581), the city of Amritsar (amrit sarovar –‘bathing pool’) acquired a sacred status due to its foundation having been laid by the venerated guru. The land around the sacred tank was donated by the Moghul emperor Akbar who had bought the land from the peasants of the area.¹ The fifth guru, Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606), subsequently had the Golden Temple constructed in the middle of the sacred tank.

The embedding of economy into the spiritual domain can be seen in the foundation of Amritsar city and the Golden Temple. Starting from the donation of the land by the Moghul monarch Akbar for the construction of the sacred tank, the material and the spiritual are indistinguishably combined- Akbar displayed his material power by donating land and also revealed his spirituality by showing reverence for Guru Ram Das. The subsequent construction of the Temple and the tank involves materiality in the form of voluntary collective labour (kar seva) provided by the spiritually-inspired ‘Sikhs’ or community of followers of the guru (the sangat) for the construction of the Temple and the tank. Such free labour could not have been otherwise voluntarily available- both in quantity as well as in quality- for a non-religious venture.

The intertwining of the spiritual and the material was formalized by the sixth guru, Guru Hargobind (1595-1644), whose father, Guru Arjan, had been martyred by the Moghul emperor Jehangir.² Guru Hargobind viewed Guru Arjan’s martyrdom as a historical moment of great significance in the evolution of the Sikh community- he understood that the expanding Sikh community could no longer be defended by the pacifist form of spirituality that his predecessors had practiced and preached (F. Singh 2000). He advocated militant spiritualism and gave a call to his followers to procure arms and horses with the purpose of building an army to wage a war against

¹ There is some speculation about the exact nature of the acquisition of land for the excavation of the site. However, it is widely acknowledged that Emperor Akbar had given a revenue-free land grant to the third Guru, Amar Das, who in refusing to accept the gift, agreed to it being passed on to his daughter Bibi Bhani, the wife of the fourth Guru, Ram Das (Grewal 1996). Also see Banerjee (1963) cited in J.S. Grewal (1997a) ‘The Sikh Movement During the Reign of Akbar’ in Irfan Habib (ed.) *Akbar and His India*, Oxford University Press: New Delhi.

² The contrast between Akbar’s donation of land to Guru Ram Das and his son Jehangir’s persecution of the fifth Guru highlights the divergent approaches that the different Mughal emperors took towards the emerging Sikh faith.

the Moghul rulers. To put a stamp of spirituality on his new focus on materiality, he constructed the Akal Takhat ('the throne of the Timeless God') just across from the Harimandar (the Golden Temple). He sat in the Akal Takhat on a throne, like an emperor and held court or a darbar (Fenech 2008, K. Singh 1999:63). He girded two swords, one symbolizing his spiritual authority as the sixth guru of the Sikhs, and the other his temporal/material power (Grewal 1998:64). He conceptualized the dialectical mixing of the two differently meaning swords as miri-piri (temporal-spiritual) and looked upon the spatial proximity of the spiritual centre (Harimandar) to the temporal (Akal Takhat) as a part of the same dialectical vision of the intertwining of the spiritual and the material.¹ This dialectical mixing of the spiritual and the material was creatively reemployed by the tenth and the last guru, Guru Gobind Singh, when he coined the term saint-soldier (sant sipahi) to describe his community of followers who were spiritually motivated to take to arms to defend the religious and political rights of the community.

In the coming together of the spiritual and material, it is not necessary that both are always of equal importance. There is bound to be shifting of importance of one over the other at different points of time. In the evolution of the Sikh community, although there is a thread of continuity running between the different gurus' periods regarding the intertwining of the spiritual and the material, the periods of the sixth and the tenth gurus can be interpreted as those where there was greater emphasis on the material while the periods of the other gurus as the ones where there was greater engagement with the spiritual. The Harimandar was attacked and destroyed three times by Afghan invaders Ahmad Shah Abdali and Nadir Shah (1757, 1762 and 1764) after which it was rebuilt into its present structure during the

¹ Another interpretation of the paradigm shift Guru Hargobind brought about in Sikhism is that the large-scale conversion of the Jat peasant community to Sikhism due to Sikhism's emphasis on egalitarianism contributed significantly towards transforming the character of the Sikh community from a purely religious-spiritual community to a community that was also concerned with worldly and material affairs (McLeod 1996: 9-13). For a critical evaluation of this interpretation which welcomes McLeod's insight based on his historical-evolutionary method but also criticises the reductionist elements in his method and the essentialist aspects of his views regarding the Jats, see Singh 2008 (pp 23 and 177). For a larger panoramic view of the shifts between non-violent and violent forms of struggle in the evolution of the Sikh community which explains these shifts as responses to different practices of the state powers such as the Moghul, British and post-colonial Indian nationalism, see P. Singh 2007.

period of the Sikh Misls starting in 1765 (F. Singh 2000). It is here that we see the next phase of the rebuilding of the Harimandar and the sarovar through a conscious spiritual economy. In 1764 a sheet was spread by the Khalsa (Sikh congregation) which collected offerings totaling nine lakh rupees (G. Singh 1958:4 cited in F. Singh 2000) which was entrusted in the hands of the reputed bankers of Amritsar at the time to look after the financing of the project of rebuilding the temple and the tank.

The political-material clearly took precedence over the spiritual when the Sikhs became the sovereign rulers of the Punjab when one of the Sikh chieftains Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) became the Maharaja of Punjab in 1799 by militarily defeating the Moghul rulers and his rival Sikh chieftains in the Punjab (K. Singh 1997, P. Singh and Rai 2009). It is during his regime that the Golden Temple acquired the adjective Swaran or 'Golden' because he donated the gold that adorns the building of the Golden Temple. This donation of the gold by Ranjit Singh was certainly an act of spiritual reverence for this most sacred shrine and that is how it has been presented in the literature on Sikh studies. What remains ignored in the historical narratives of the Sikhs and the Punjab is that this was also a political act motivated by material motivations for seeking economic and political supremacy. Almost all Sikh princes and aristocratic families used to donate land grants to the Golden Temple. By donating a large quantity of gold that could decorate the entire building of the Golden Temple, Ranjit Singh was demonstrating that he was the supreme leader of the Sikhs and was not just one among the several Sikh rajas who could afford to give only land grants. He was the 'maharaja' who could afford such an opulently impressive gold donation.

The other side of the spiritual-material dialectic is that the gold decoration made the Golden Temple a unique shrine. Its spiritual mystique also increased as a result of this material transformation. The hugely elevated material, political and spiritual status of the Golden Temple sharpened the contestation for religious and political control of the site. The Afghan invaders in their pursuance of Punjab in the Eighteenth Century, demolished the Golden Temple several times to demonstrate their military might to the Sikhs (and the Mughal darbar in Delhi). The demolition was an act of religious hatred- aimed at dealing a blow to the religious and political significance of the Golden Temple. It was also aimed at causing material damage to the Temple and, through that, inflicting economic hardship on the Sikh community. The establishment of the katras (residential and business areas) by a number of Sikh Sardars (stately men) during the Misl period was seen as a preventative strategy to protect the Harimandar from future attacks. The construction of the katras around the Golden Temple was a means of

defending the shrine and fortifying the Golden Temple by a buffer of community activity and economic strength. Each *katra* consisted of a main street, a bazaar, *havelis* (mansions) of the Sardars and a series of interconnected streets which maintained the original city surrounding the Golden Temple as a pedestrian area (F. Singh 2000). Even today, the bazaars that surround the Golden Temple represent the local, traditional and business culture of Amritsar, some of which panders to the demands of the Golden Temple tourist economy. The traditional, nostalgic notions of the city of Amritsar are indeed associated with the *katras* and their specialized services and intricate, congested, narrow roads. The character and history of the walled city of Amritsar in this sense embodies the spiritual economy which established this foundation of the bazaars acting as a protecting force for one of the holiest pilgrimage sites of the region.

During British rule, the Sikh community fought a long drawn out battle against the imperial government to get democratic control over the management of the Golden Temple. The colonial government understood the intertwining of the religious and the political behind the movement for Sikhs' democratic control over the Golden Temple. They saw in the outwardly religious campaign the political message of independence from British control. Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of India's independence movement from British rule, lent support to the Sikh campaign for democratic control over the management of the Golden Temple not only for the religious nature of the demand but also due to its political significance for India's independence movement. The Sikhs won the battle and Gandhi called it the victory of the first battle for India's independence.¹ (M. Singh 1988). Gandhi's hailing of the Sikh victory can be interpreted not only because Gandhi viewed the victory as a powerful component of the political struggle led by him for India's independence but also because he viewed this as a vindication of the Gandhian principle of intertwining the moral and the political. The successful culmination of the Sikhs' non-violent struggle appeared to Gandhi as the endorsement of his philosophy of *ahimsa* (non-violence).² The mutuality of the political/material and the spiritual/religious

¹ When the Sikhs' central religious committee -Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC)- won control of the Golden Temple in January 1922, Gandhi sent a telegram to the Sikh leader Baba Kharak Singh: 'FIRST BATTLE FOR INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE WON, CONGRATULATIONS' (cited in M Singh 1988: 50). For a Sikh nationalist reading of Gandhi's telegraphic message as an ideological weapon to keep Sikhs within the Hindu and Indian nationalist fold, see A. Singh (2003: 81).

² For a very imaginative and original examination of the ideological interface between Gandhism and Sikhism in the context of the victory of the Sikhs'

can be seen in more than one way in Gandhi's celebration of the Sikh victory. On the one hand, the Sikhs' successful religious struggle empowered the Gandhian discourse and practice of non-violent route to gaining India's independence from British imperial rule and on the other, Gandhi's celebration and endorsement of Sikhs acquiring control of the Golden Temple added to the religious importance of the Golden Temple in the Indian and the imperial imagination.

In independent India, the Golden Temple became the site of many struggles involving the Sikhs community where the politico-economic and the spiritual-religious realms inter-mingled and reinforced each other. Two historical events are especially important to illustrate the intertwining of the religious and the material domains. One was the imposition of national emergency in 1975 by Indira Gandhi, then Indian prime minister, and the Sikh resistance to that with the headquarter of the resistance located in the Golden Temple, and the other was the Operation Blue Star military operation launched at the Golden Temple by Indira Gandhi government in 1984. The 1975 national emergency was imposed by Indira Gandhi to deal with the rising opposition threat to her political power. A large number of leaders and activists of the Sikh Akali party were arrested as a part of the national swoop against all anti-emergency political currents in the country. The Akali leaders and activists who managed to escape arrest organised the most active and persistent segment of the non-violent countrywide opposition to emergency rule. Every day during the entire 19 months of emergency rule, a group of Akali volunteers would pray at the Golden Temple and would come out and shout slogans against the emergency. The group would then be arrested for violating the prohibitory orders. Over 40,000 Akali workers were arrested for their participation in the anti-emergency campaign (Narang 1983: 192). This was the most sustained opposition to the emergency rule in the country. It was a political movement but could be sustained for the entire 19 months of the emergency rule because of spiritual inspiration the Sikh activist derived by praying at the Golden Temple before courting arrest. The politico-economic and spiritual came together in the act of courting arrest after the prayers at the Golden Temple.

The 1984 Operation Blue Star military operation launched at the Golden Temple by Indira Gandhi government was not only to crush a religious

non-violent campaign for the control of the Golden Temple, see Uberoi (1996: 112-123).

movement for separate identity among the Sikhs from the Hindus, it was also to suppress the assertion of the demand for regional economic and political autonomy (Nayar and Singh 1984, K. Singh 2005, P. Singh 2008, Tully and Jacob 1986). Every time the Golden Temple has been demolished, whether by Afghan incursions in the Eighteenth Century or in 1984 by Indian state forces, its reconstruction in even more shining glory is viewed as not only an act of spiritual retrieval of the shrine, it is also seen as an act of demonstrating Sikhs' economic clout and political assertion. Both demolitions as well as reconstruction are religious acts as well as politico-economic statements. The spiritual economy is evident in demolition as well as in reconstruction- one through negation and the other through assertion.

The contemporary context of the Golden Temple shows an array of examples of the spiritual economy. Immediately outside of the temple complex exists a bazaar of souvenir shops which sell a wide variety of items for the thousands of visitors to the site each day. The recent proliferation of images of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who had led the rebellion of Sikh separatism in the late 1970s to early 1980s,¹ is revealing of an assertion and reassertion. A range of economic activities have stemmed from this recent wave of assertion which can be seen in the sale of stickers, calendars, photos, t-shirts, CDs, DVDs, headscarves and books carrying the image of Bhindranwale, so much so that the institution that Bhindranwale had headed (Dam Dami Taksal) has opened a book and souvenir shop near to the Golden Temple complex, advertising its 'reopening' in the mainstream market area. This is significant as previously the Dam Dami Taksal activities had been seriously curtailed by the Indian security forces for their alleged 'anti-national' undertones. The visibility of the rather imposing symbol of Bhindranwale on modes of both public and private transport - the fronts of buses and public carriers, the back windows of private cars, three-wheeler auto rickshaws and two-wheeler scooters - gives a sense that Bhindranwale's symbolism occupies a mobile position on the various types of vehicles where it can be found, contrary to official, particularly state discourse which renders him defunct and a relic of the past. The marketing of these images in the contemporary context, 30 years after the 1984 storming of the Golden Temple by state forces, is a complex mixture of nostalgia, reassertion, commodification and, perhaps, resurgence. The spiritual economy of Bhindranwale's image captures the interpenetration of the collective memory of the trauma of 1984 with the economic tensions and political upheavals in Punjab. The fact that these symbols can be purchased in the bazaars surrounding the Golden Temple

¹ For a contextual understanding of the political economy of religious revivalism in the 1970s and 1980s Punjab, see P. Singh (1987).

further this (Singh and Purewal 2013).

The activities which go on within the gurdwara complex are also an important dimension of the spiritual economy of the Golden Temple. Each person who pays respects to the Holy Book, The Guru Granth Sahib, makes a donation or offering which goes into the golak or donation box. Donations of wheat, rice, milk, marble and even technical expertise, bridge the notion of donation and 'seva' or free service. The labour which goes into the upkeep and service of the temple, including the 'free kitchen' or langar, involves a mixture of voluntary service and monetary donations. Thus, the flows of people which stream into the gurdwara complex are matched by flows of monetary activity, whether in cash, commodity or kind, showing the site to exhibit a complex spiritual economy. The kar seva ('renovation') of the sarovar ('pool of nectar' or 'bathing pool') commenced in 2004, largely funded by Sikhs in the diaspora drawing voluntary labour (seva) from India and collaboration with local sants and sangats. Both the re-plating of the gold on the Golden Temple led by Bhai Mohinder Singh (Nishkam Sevak Jatha, Birmingham, U.K.) and the installation of a circulation system within the sarovar by a U.S.-based Sikh business family exhibits a glimpse of the global dimensions of the spiritual economy of the upkeep and adornment of the Golden Temple. The engraved marble plaques and stones with the names of deceased loved ones, often with the amount of donation also engraved, all around the parikrama (the inner circle of the complex which surrounds the sarovar) carry a reminder of the monetary donations which are a part of the spiritual space. Other means by which people offer monetary contributions is through the holding of akhand paath (sponsored, continuous recitations of The Guru Granth Sahib) for which a donation to the gurdwara committee is accepted at a set rate which covers the labour and other costs associated with the function. These are just a few examples of how the spiritual economy operates within the functioning of the Golden Temple, incorporating a range of different activities which carry monetary and spiritual values which overlap and intersect with one another.

Conclusion

The historical legacy of the Golden Temple is exhibited in the contemporary processes that go on in the local bazaars which surround the Golden Temple as well as in the types of activities that exist within the complex of the Golden Temple, ranging from donations to volunteerism. Since its inception, the Golden Temple has unquestionably retained its status as the nerve centre of Sikh socio-political activity and religious devotion while having a particular association with economic processes stemming from this history. This article has attempted to highlight some of the ways in which the Golden

Temple is imbued with a spiritual economy that touches in many fold ways the lives of the people in the region and beyond. The examination of the Golden Temple through the lens of spiritual economy illustrates the enmeshing of the spiritual and the material in the making, sustenance and development of the sacred and symbolic site of the Golden Temple. This spiritual economy reading of the Golden Temple, in turn, helps to illuminate how the religious and the material worlds remain enmeshed in the cycle of every day life.

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